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Justice Department Is Reviewing Case Of Missile Officer

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The Justice Department is reviewing the case of an Air Force missile officer who made unauthorized visits to the Soviet Embassy here and has not ruled out a prosecution, officials said yesterday.

Department sources said a case still could be put together against 2nd Lt. Christopher Cooke even though the Air Force promised him immunity for cooperating in its own investigation.

Cooke, 25, deputy commander of a Titan II nuclear missile launch crew, was charged by the Air Force last week with making three unauthorized visits to the embassy.

Defense sources said the Air Force promised Cooke immunity in an effort to learn what information he might have delivered to the Soviets but later withdrew the immunity on grounds that Cooke was not fully cooperative.

The Justice Department then opened its own investigation, at the Pentagon's request, to determine if Cooke violated any federal criminal laws, including those relating to espionage.

A top Justice Department official said the government is reviewing Cooke's case and does not know the effect of the Air Force immunity promise. "If he's been given a promise that it will not be used, then we pretty much can't use that evidence," the official said.

Meanwhile, it was discovered yesterday that Cooke wrote a guest newspaper editorial in 1978 denouncing the U.S. military's emphasis on nuclear weapons, particularly the neutron device.

"Is the United States so insecure in its status as a power vis-a-vis the Soviets that it must progress in policy to the brink of worldwide disaster?" Cooke wrote in the Norfolk Ledger-Star Jan. 18, 1978.

Cooke, then a senior at Old Dominion University, declared, "There seems to be an insatiable appetite in the defense community for establishing military superiority in an era where superiority is a meaningless term; where any nuclear war, tactical or otherwise, will consummate itself in the only possible outcome: the destruction of humanity on a scale uncomprehended by history."

The editorial was in response to an article by syndicated columnist John Chamberlain supporting the neutron device as an effective weapon against the Soviet tank threat in central Europe.